

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

An Economic Interpretation
of Secession: Opinions in
Mississippi in the
1850's

A part of a dissertation submitted to the faculty
of the division of the Social Sciences in candidacy
of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY
1936

BY
PERCY LEE RAINWATER

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Although expansion in the United States has been fundamentally national rather than sectional in character, particular sections have frequently been more intent than the nation as a whole for the acquisition of territory. An instance in point is the South in the decade after 1850. Her appetite for expansion into Mexico and the Caribbean region, for instance, increased in direct proportion to the preponderance of political power in the hands of the "Black Republicans" pledged to the preservation of slavery. In Mississippi, the desire for expansion southward seems to have been motivated by the fact that slavery was forever shut out of the economic life of the United States and that if slavery was to be maintained, it had to advance in that direction. In the national campaign of 1860, and immediately thereafter, the arguments used in Mississippi were to the effect that such a course would lead to the extension of slavery into Mexico and the Caribbean, and that such a guarantee for perpetuation of the institution of slavery in the South. In the future of the institution of slavery in the South, and that a rival Rome in its palmy days." For two years before the election of Lincoln, agitation for expansion was intense.

The several steps in the attainment of such national grandeur, a Natchez paper suggested, included (1) expansion into Mexico, Central America, and the islands of the Caribbean, (2) reopening of the African slave trade, (3) establishment of free trade, and (4) the development of a system of internal improvements, especially railroads, which would tap all the agricultural areas of the state and connect them with commercial cities on the Gulf whose harbors

¹ Natchez Free Trader, Nov. 24, 1860.



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Although expansion in the United States has been fundamentally national rather than sectional in character, particular sections have frequently been more intent than the nation as a whole for the acquisition of territory. An instance in point is the South in the decade after 1850. Her appetite for expansion into Mexico and the Caribbean region, for instance, increased in direct proportion to the preponderance of political power in the hands of the "Black Republicans" pledged to oppose further extension of slavery. In Mississippi, the desire to expand to the southward seems to have been motivated by the feeling that slavery was forever shut out of the existing territories of the United States and that if slavery were extended at all, it would have to advance in that direction. During the presidential campaign of 1860, and immediately afterwards, one of the arguments used in Mississippi for immediate secession was that such a course offered the only hope of the extension of slavery into Mexico and the Caribbean region and the only guarantee for perpetuating the social and economic system of the South. In the fifties, practically all the opinion-forming agencies in the state were united in the view that the future of the institution depended upon its extension to the southward, and that a southern confederacy, once independent, would come to "rival Rome in its palmy days."¹ For two years before the election of Lincoln, agitation for expansion was intense.

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¹ *Natchez Free Trader*, Nov. 24, 1860.

would be the "anchorage and the trysting places of the fleets of commerce."²

On January 5, 1858, the *Natchez Free Trader* urged the necessity of a strong national policy with reference to Central American affairs.

We must [said the editor] abrogate the Clayton-Bulwer treaty, we must authorize the President to carry out the stipulations of the treaty with Nicaragua. These two steps will inaugurate our southward movement with dignity and success. If England or France protest against it, and endeavour to stop us in our national path, we must defy them at once. We have been humbugged long enough with the Elliotts in Texas, the Packenhams in Mexico, the Chatfields, Wykes and Mannings in Central America.

The editor asserted that if Congress and the executive branch of the government did not adopt a more aggressive policy in Central America, the "people will do it and any attempt to suppress them in their action will only lead to bitter sectional strife and dissensions." William Barksdale, addressing a "Jackson Democratic Association" in Washington, declared that the "whole unbounded continent is ours." He wanted Cuba, and although not strictly a Walker man, he wanted Nicaragua—"in fact the whole of Central America."³ L. Q. C. Lamar was in favor of expansion into Central America because he wanted to see "American Liberty with southern institutions planted upon every inch of American soil." He thought the institutions of the South "give us the highest

² *Ibid.*, June 15, 1858. The *Natchez Free Trader* seems to have led the press of the state in championing the cause of southern expansion along the lines indicated. From February to May, 1858, the following "Prospectus" had a continuous run in the first column of the editorial page of that paper:

1. The immediate organization of the militia as contemplated in the constitution and the laws.

2. The sovereignty of the State.

3. Building of railroads, trunks, and branches, uniting all the cities, towns, and villages of the South by one common and indissoluble bond.

4. The encouragement of Southern colleges and schools.

5. The fostering of Southern literature and the earnest support of Southern journals.

6. The creation of a Southern marine and the establishment of direct trade.

7. The building up and the sustaining of Southern factories, foundries, and manufactures.

8. The protectorate over Mexico.

9. The Southern Republicanization of Central America.

10. The annexation of Cuba and the isles of the Gulf.

11. Equality in the Union or the Independence of the Southern United States of America.

³ *Ibid.*, Feb. 25, 1858. Like sentiments were expressed by Barksdale in speech to the people of Carroll County, in the *Mississippian*, Sept. 28, 1859.

type of civilization known to modern times." Lamar asserted that territorial acquisitions from Mexico "have been to the South like the far-famed fruit which grows upon the shores of the accursed sea, beautiful to sight but dust and ashes to the lips." Hence, before he would consent to "any new schemes of territorial acquisition, to be effected, as usual, by the prowess of southern arms, and the contribution of southern blood and treasure, I desire the question of the south's right to extend her institutions into territory already within the Union, practically and satisfactorily settled by the Legislation of this Congress."⁴ In his speech at Hazelhurst, September 11, 1858, Senator A. G. Brown assumed that Mississippians were interested in planting slave states in Central America. "If we want Central America, the cheapest, easiest, and quickest way is to go and take it, and if France and England interfere, read the Monroe Doctrine to them." There should be no more scruples, he said, about taking desired territory to the southward than there was in taking a large part of Mississippi from the "Choctaws and the Chickasaws." He frankly admitted that he believed that "slavery must go South if it goes at all" and that he wanted possession of Central America "to plant slavery there." He thought slavery was of divine origin; a good thing *per se*; a great moral and social blessing, both to the master and to the slave; and he thought it should be extended with missionary zeal "like the religion of the Divine Master to the uttermost ends of the earth." He thought William Walker was "doing a good service and ought to have been let alone."⁵

⁴ *Cong. Globe*, 35th Cong., 1st Sess., Pt. I, 279, Jan. 13, 1858.

⁵ M. W. Cluskey, *Speeches, Messages, and Other Writings of the Honorable Albert Gallatin Brown* (Philadelphia, 1859), 588-599. Brown made similar statements in a speech at Tammany Hall, New York City, a report of which appears in the *Natchez Free Trader*, Mar. 20, 1859.

Speech of O. R. Singleton, *Cong. Globe*, 36th Cong., 1st Sess., Pt. IV, Appendix, 53, Dec. 19, 1859. "... how are we to preserve the institution of slavery? There is but one mode by which, in my humble judgment, it can be perpetuated for any considerable number of years. We may fail in that, but certainly it is the surest chance offered us to preserve it. That mode is by expansion, and that expansion must be in the direction of Mexico. At present there is no settled government there. It is, to all intents and purposes, defunct; and we have the right to the exclusion of all others, to administer upon the estate; and when we have wound it up, there being no better heirs than ourselves, we will be compelled to hold that territory. That will afford us an outlet for slavery. There is in Mexico a large extent of territory that is suited to the cultivation of cotton, sugar, and rice. In my opinion we must, and we are compelled to, expand in that direction, and thus perpetuate it—a hundred or a thousand years it may be."

William Walker himself, in June, 1858, came to Mississippi. He spoke at Aberdeen in the interest of securing assistance for the recovery of power in Nicaragua. The editor of the *Prairie News*, who heard and reported the speech of the "hero", declared that it

was singularly characterized by modesty, scarcely an allusion to himself was made, and he shows in words as he ever has done in action, his devotion to the South and her institutions. He closed his speech by appealing to the mothers of Mississippi, to bid their sons buckle on the armor of war, and battle for the institutions, for the honor of the Sunny South, and called upon the maidens of the land, who had lovers suing for favor, to smile on none until they should give active aid to the cause, not for himself but for the cause of Nicaragua's freedom to the cause of the South.

The citizens of Aberdeen looked with such favor upon the filibuster's scheme that they "resolved to raise ten thousand dollars to assist General Walker to recover possession of Nicaragua."⁶

Two of the resolutions introduced by John J. McRae at the Southern Convention at Vicksburg, May 8-10, 1859, dealt with the desirability of absorbing the territory southward to the Isthmus. The first declared that "the interests and necessity of the South, as well as the entire country, require the permanent ascendancy of the United States in the Gulf of Mexico, and to insure this end, the Gulf must be made an American sea, and the Isthmian transits to the Pacific, placed under American control." The second favored the immediate acquisition of Cuba, the abrogation of the Clayton-Bulwer treaty, and the Americanization of Central America. These resolutions were approved by the convention, though ex-Senator Walker Brooke of Vicksburg denounced such sentiments "as disgraceful to the American people and contrary to the law of nations."

J. P. Pryor, newspaper editor of Vicksburg and Memphis and political friend of Douglas, inquired of the Illinois senator what steps he proposed to bring about the consummation of territorial acquisition in the Caribbean region. Pryor in-

⁶ *Prairie News*, July 1, 15, 1858.

⁷ *Natchez Free Trader*, May 21, 1859; Herbert Wender, *The Southern Commercial Conventions, 1837-1859*, Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science, XLVIII, No. 4 (Baltimore, 1930), 230. Speeches of John J. McRae at Natchez, *Natchez Courier*, Sept. 22, 1859; at Terry, *Natchez Free Trader*, June 24, 1859; at Enterprise, *ibid.*, July 2, 1859.

formed Douglas that the "acquisition of Cuba is a question in which your friends in this region take an interest second only to that of 'Congressional non-intervention.'"⁸ A number of the county Democratic conventions, April-June, 1859, declared for expansion to the southward. The Lawrence County convention resolved that "we are in favor of the acquisition of Cuba, by conquest or purchase, peaceably if we can, forcibly if we must, as indemnity for the past and security for the future."⁹ Copiah County declared that the government ought to acquire Cuba because of its "proximity to our Southern territory." But if this were not "practicable . . . we would say to the filibusters God Speed."¹⁰ The Democratic state convention declared in its platform that the acquisition of Cuba was a "commercial and political necessity."¹¹

In 1860 when secession was a sharp issue in Mississippi, the Democratic press did not overlook the advantage to their cause of describing the opportunities which a southern confederacy, once formed, would have for extending its institutions to the southward. An editorial in the *Vicksburg Weekly Sun* in answer to the question, "Would the South be injured by a dissolution of the Union?" declared:

We verily believe that the overthrow of the Union would not only perpetuate slavery where it now exists and establish it more firmly, but would necessarily lead to its widespread extension. The Southern States once constituted as an independent Republic, the acquisition of Mexico, Central America, Cuba, San Domingo, and other West India Islands would follow as a direct and necessary result. It would not be in the power of the North to prevent it, unless by an appeal to arms terminating in the subjugation of the South, and we presume that Abolition fanaticism would hardly venture upon such a Quixotic experiment as that. In possession of the Gulf of Mexico and our institutions established upon what is now the free soil of Mexico the whole coast would be thrown open to slave emigration, while the Northern and Western States would be completely cut off from our present possessions in that quarter. California would speedily become a slave State. The enormous wealth she is now pouring into the lap of the North, would at once be withdrawn and become tributary to Southern prosperity and Southern power. While the Union lasts, it is in the

⁸ J. P. Pryor to S. A. Douglas, Aug. 31, 1859, Douglas Letters, University of Chicago Library.

⁹ *Natchez Free Trader*, May 28, 1859.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, May 13, 1859.

¹¹ Proceedings of the Democratic state convention, *ibid.*, July 8, 1859.

power of the Northern majority to confine slavery to such territory as we already possess. She will exercise that power. Of course no sane man believes that another slave State will ever be admitted into the Union. If they see proper the dominant majority in Congress—and this they would certainly do—can prevent the annexation of Mexico and Cuba, and other territories where slavery now exists and would be likely to go. Dissolve the Union, however, and the case is altered. The South would then be free to carry, without let or hindrance, her institutions far beyond the limits to which they must be confined under our present form of government. In the Union the South cannot expand beyond her present limits; out of it she can extend her institutions over Mexico, Cuba, San Domingo and other West India Islands and California, and thereby become the most powerful Republic that ever the sun shone upon.¹²

The *Natchez Free Trader* was not less optimistic than the *Vicksburg Sun* about the future of the South. The *Free Trader* agreed enthusiastically with the *New York Herald* that should a southern confederacy be formed, the entire region down to the Isthmus would be absorbed. Then the confederacy would have "a vast territory, rich in natural wealth, and holding the monopoly of the cotton, sugar and tobacco trade of the world." It would have "rich gold mines, silver, copper, iron, coal, fine seaports, and a great foreign trade. Then the Gulf of Mexico will be simply a Southern lake, to be whitened with thousands of Southern sails." Mexico, with the Anglo-Saxon race to govern it and the African race—which would "thrive wonderfully under Mexican skies—to till the soil and work the mines would rise like a new Phoenix from her ashes." Such, according to the *Free Trader*, was the "happy future of the great Republic of the Southern United States" which would, in a "not far distant day, stand foremost in the ranks of the first powers of the world, totally eclipsing in might, consequence, and grandeur any nation now or hereafter existing on this continent, if not in this hemisphere."¹³

In view of the resplendent future of a southern confederacy, as depicted by the Democratic press and by secession orators, one is not surprised that A. C. Holt of Wilkinson County, during his canvass for the Convention of 1861, asserted that "with our rights fully guaranteed for all time, as

¹² Oct. 29, 1860.

¹³ Nov. 24, 1860.

they would be under a Southern Confederacy, there is no safer or better investment than land and negroes."¹⁴

One of the corollaries of expansion, in the interest of securing more slave territory, was the reopening of the African slave trade. The *Natchez Free Trader* announced, February 2, 1859, that it would advocate immediate opening. "Up with the African slave trade," said the editor, and "down with so much of the neutrality laws as give us masters for the expansion of the South." A year later the same editor had gathered momentum and enthusiasm on the subject and was warmly demanding that "the law declaring the slave trade 'piracy' be repealed." He asserted that

it is a matter of vital interest to the cotton producing States to have free slave trade for slaves. The doctrine of expansion is a nullity and a mockery without it. Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas require, at this moment, a million more laborers, and it is folly to talk of annexing Cuba, Mexico and Central America without free trade with Africa. Let the great work of evangelizing Africa and civilizing the negro commence. It is the order of Providence. It is the mission confided to us. And if Congress be deaf and blind to the appeal and the duty, let the State exercise its sovereign functions, and who dare say nay.¹⁵

The Southern Commercial Convention which met at Vicksburg in May, 1859, concerned itself, in the spirit of its predecessors at Montgomery, Alabama, with controversial political questions rather than with purely commercial problems. After approving the McRae resolutions for expansion into Mexico and Central America, the convention, by a vote of forty-four to nineteen, declared "that all laws, state or Federal, prohibiting the foreign slave trade ought to be repealed."¹⁶ I. M. Patridge, editor of the *Vicksburg Whig*,

¹⁴ A. C. Holt, *The Policy of Secession* (published pamphlet, n. d., in the Department of Archives and History, Jackson, Miss.). Holt's speech of which the preceding was the title, was, at the request of a committee composed of Vincent Row, H. R. Davis, Thomas J. Henderson, Felix Embree, and C. Posey, printed in circular or pamphlet form and used as a campaign document in Wilkinson County during the campaign for the election of delegates to the Convention of 1861.

¹⁵ *Natchez Free Trader*, Feb. 5, 1859. Editorials in the *Free Trader* expressing similar views appeared in the issues for Feb. 16, Mar 3, 1858, Apr. 8, May 7, 18, and July 13, 1859. See also the *Vicksburg Weekly Sun*, May 13, Aug. 15, 1859. R. T. Archer, delegate from Claiborne County, said in the convention: "It is God's policy and man's policy to reopen the slave trade." See *Vicksburg Weekly Sun*, Aug. 15, 1859.

¹⁶ *Natchez Courier*, May 17, 1859. The vote was taken by states. The majority of the delegates from Georgia, Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Arkansas, and Alabama voted aye—forty votes; Tennessee and Florida voted no—fifteen votes; and South Carolina was equally divided—four votes: See also Wender, *Southern Commercial Conventions*, 230-234.

offered a protest against the action of the convention and when, by a large majority, the assembly upheld the decision of the chair that the protest was out of order, Patridge, H. S. Foote, and G. V. Moody resigned their seats and retired.

The Whig or Opposition party in Mississippi was a unit in opposing the reopening of the slave trade. This opposition seems to have been based upon principle and not mere party policy. An organization was formed to combat the movement which, in the view of the Whigs, was mere agitation for the dissolution of the Union. On May 21, 1859, a mass meeting of those in Warren and adjacent counties who were opposed to the reopening of the African slave trade, was held in Apollo Hall, Vicksburg. Foote called the meeting to order and M. C. Folkes, mayor of Vicksburg, presided. At this meeting a permanent organization was effected, consisting of William L. Sharkey, president; W. C. Smedes of Warren and Thomas S. Dabney of Hinds, vice-presidents; and A. G. Mayers of Rankin and W. W. Cowan of Warren, secretaries. Whig orators, among them Foote, Patridge, Smedes, and Sharkey, denounced the "Agitators" for their advocacy of such an "impolitic, unwise, and ruinous" program as the reopening of the trade. In his speech at Yazoo City, Foote summed up the argument against it. He declared that the importation of slaves from Africa would lead to an overproduction of cotton and of slaves. He pointed out that the present rate of natural increase of slaves was such as to double their number in twenty-three and a half years and that if local interest demanded more slaves than natural increase provided, they "could be easily obtained from Virginia and Maryland, and other slave-breeding States." Furthermore, to import "thousands, and perhaps millions of wild and savage Africans" to be infused into "our slave population will greatly retard their advancement in moral and religious culture, diminish their happiness and inevitably degrade both masters and slaves; altogether uprooting the present kindly relations existing between these classes making a more rigid and penal discipline indispensable, and involving the white population in danger of being demoralized and brutalized."¹⁷

¹⁷ With reference to Whig opposition to the reopening of the foreign slave trade, see the following: *Natchez Courier*, May 14, 27, June 13, 14, 15, 1859; *Prairie News*, Mar. 25, 1858, July 21, 1859.

Those who had control of the Democratic party machinery in Mississippi in 1859 were opposed to the agitation for reopening the slave trade. This opposition was, however, based entirely upon party policy and not at all upon any principle of humanity. "If we had considered the purposes of humanity alone," said Jefferson Davis, "we should have continued it [the foreign slave trade] indefinitely."¹⁸ Davis was in favor of the repeal of that part of the act of 1820 which declared the foreign slave trade to be piracy, because "it is offensive to us and mischievous in its effects and tendencies." He favored, as did the rest of the Mississippi delegation in Congress in 1859—except John J. McRae, who wanted all Federal laws on the subject repealed—a modification of the law of 1819. He objected to that part of it which required the president to return slaves taken aboard ships on the high seas. He advocated likewise the abrogation of the treaty which required the United States, in conjunction with England and France, to keep a squadron on the coast of Africa for police purposes.¹⁹ Had the Federal laws and treaties on the subject been thus modified or changed, there can be little doubt that the result would have amounted to a virtual reopening of the African slave trade.²⁰

¹⁸ Speech of Jefferson Davis on the Naval Appropriation bill, June 18, 1860, in Dunbar Rowland, (ed.), *Jefferson Davis, Constitutionalist, His Papers, Letters and Speeches* (Jackson, Miss., 1923), IV, 520 ff.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ For an analysis of the statutes undertaking to regulate the slave trade, see W. E. Burghardt Du Bois, *The Suppression of the African Slave Trade to the United States of America, 1638-1870* (New York, 1904), 94-105, 118-123. Under the construction which the United States placed upon the right of visitation and search, a slaver, if captured at all, would not likely be intercepted before reaching some southern port. Offenders would, therefore, be tried before juries with decided leanings in favor of the defendant. Conviction would be difficult. Jefferson Davis himself admitted the truth of this statement when, in his speech on the Naval Appropriation bill, cited above, he said that one engaged in the illicit African slave trade would never be convicted on a charge of "Piracy" in a region "where men consider it no offense to buy an African slave and sell him to another."

On March 3, 1858, the editor of the *Natchez Free Trader* declared that he had it upon "indisputable" evidence which was "authenticated by the operators" themselves, that the African slave trade was in operation in the South. According to the "information" vouchsafed to the editor of the *Free Trader*: "We may estimate a cargo to number seven hundred negroes. None purchased should be over twenty-five years of age. Seven hundred at an average cost of thirty dollars apiece, will amount to twenty-one thousand dollars, and their price in this country or Cuba will range from twelve hundred and fifty to fourteen hundred dollars. But if sold for five hundred dollars, say, the cargo will net three hundred and fifty thousand dollars for the entire expense of the voyage, and all possible loss, the profits of one round

Fear of dividing the party and distracting the entire South at a time when harmony was important, led all the Democrats, except the most ultra, to abandon the agitation for the repeal of Federal laws prohibiting the slave trade. Those who had despaired of the existing Union and who had become secessionists *per se* kept up the agitation. The *Columbus Democrat* deprecated the agitation of the slave trade question, declaring that "no one can believe for a moment" that it could be reopened "while the Union lasts. Do not its advocates desire its dissolution above all things?"²¹ The *Eastern Clarion* expressed the spirit of most of the Democratic newspapers of the state, when it said:

The question is not properly to be argued upon economical considerations, as its advocates would have us do. However, it may be regarded in this light, that does not touch the inquiry which has first to be met—that inquiry is whether the people of the South regard the re-opening of the African slave trade as a matter of sufficient importance to dissolve the Union in order to effect it. It amounts in fact to a proposition to dissolve the Union, for the purpose of importing Africans into the South. Nobody can possibly believe that the trade can be legalized IN the Union, and if the South should become united in favor of the traffic and proceed to authorize it, a contest with the federal government would be produced which could only end in dissolution. The question then, boiled down, is as we have stated. It is not surprising that the *per se* disunionists should advocate the measure. We regard the agitation of the project at this time as extremely unfortunate. It will strengthen the Abolitionists and endanger the Presidential election. It divides the South when she has need to stand as one man in view of the darkening future which lies before her. It is to all intents and purposes an impractical question so long as our present confederacy exists, and its agitation can result only in mischief.²²

voyage will amount to two hundred thousand dollars. Where the profits are so exorbitant, we can well understand why the business has been begun in the South."

C. S. Sydnor, *Slavery in Mississippi* (New York, 1933), 142, says that "native Africans were rarely found" in Mississippi in 1860.

Du Bois, *Suppression of the African Slave Trade*, 178-187, represents the African slave trade for the period 1850-1860, as being very extensive.

²¹ *Natchez Courier*, June 14, 1859, quoting *Columbus Democrat*.

²² *Prairie News*, June 9, 1859, quoting the *Clarion*. The *Mississippian* argued against making the revival of the African slave trade an issue in the next presidential campaign. Quoted in *Natchez Free Trader*, June 18, 1859. See resolutions to the same effect in the Democratic convention of Claiborne County, *Natchez Free Trader*, June 22, 1859.

H. J. Harris to Jefferson Davis, June 7, 1859: "You may have noticed that in the Southern Convention, I voted against repealing the laws against reopening the slave trade. It was a bitter pill to vote with Foote; but I honestly thought the democratic party would be destroyed by the agitation of the question *at the time*; and hence my position." Rowland, (ed.), *Jefferson Davis, Constitutionalist*, IV, 56.

According to the *Clarion*, the South could "find better grounds" upon which to "make the issue of disunion" than the reopening of the African slave trade. In this spirit the Democratic party leaders of the state discouraged further agitation of the question and focused their attention upon those issues which were finally to disrupt the party at Charleston.

Notwithstanding the efforts of the majority of the Democrats in the state to prevent further agitation of the troublesome question, a bill to repeal the state law against the introduction of Africans into Mississippi was presented to the lower house of the legislature in January, 1860. It was defeated.²³

The movement in the South for commercial, financial, and social independence was synchronized with the shift of political power into the hands of the free states. Laboring under the mistaken idea that the growing wealth of the North was attributable to discriminatory legislation by Congress, in one form or another, against the South, a number of Southern Commercial Conventions were held at intervals from 1837 to 1859. All of these conventions stressed the great importance to the South of a system of free trade. They were void, however, of tangible results other than to convince the South that her economic interests were separate and distinct from those of the North and that her commerce was prevented from being distributed through its natural channels by the "unequal action of the federal government." In short, they played an important rôle in convincing the majority of the southern people by 1860 that the Union was an economic liability to the South.²⁴

"If the Union were dissolved tomorrow," said the *Natchez Free Trader*, March 3, 1858, "it is probable that ninety-nine one hundredths of the population of the Southern states would never know the fact, except by a lessening of taxation and a general improvement of trade." The editor declared that the South was paying "fifty millions a year for Northern guardianship." He assured his readers that in the event of a dissolution, "the geographical position and the agricultural products of the Southern States" would cement

²³ Vicksburg *Whig*, Jan. 28, 1860; Natchez *Courier*, Feb. 3, 1860.

²⁴ Wender, *Southern Commercial Conventions*, 171, 207, 235, 236.

the bonds of everlasting peace not only with all Europe but also with the North. Disunion, according to the *Free Trader*, would not disrupt "legitimate, peaceful and friendly trade, nor anything else except an old onerous, wornout, superannuated system of external government machinery." James Drane of Choctaw County, a small slaveholder and president of the Mississippi Senate from 1857 to 1865, regarded the Union as a "losing partnership to the South, and it is a matter of calculation whether we of the South ought longer to continue it in the midst of losses and abuses."²⁵ The *Natchez Free Trader*, April 13, 1858, argued that disunion would improve the commercial position of the South. The editor pointed out that southern port cities, especially New Orleans would, in case of disunion, flourish as never before. The editor said:

A dissolution of the present union would make New Orleans in five years what New York is now, and while the former increased in financial grandeur and wealth, the latter would decrease correspondingly. . . . A dissolution would make New Orleans the chief importing as well as exporting city of the continent, for the very good and sufficient reason that she alone would be able to pay for her imports with her exports, possessing as she does, and would, more than half of the cotton export trade. . . . The horns of the crescent would be filled with repletion with the products of all climes under the sun, and her commercial supremacy would not be questioned by any rival mart on the surface of the globe.²⁶

In the exciting period from the election of Lincoln to the secession of the state, the press did not fail to stress, along with the many other desirable results that would accrue from a dissolution, the establishment of free trade. Said the *Free Trader*:

Ere the 4th of March next the signs of the times are that a Southern Confederacy will be formed and the principle of *Free Trade* will be

²⁵ James Drane to W. S. Goodwin of Concord, New Hampshire, May 10, 1858, in *Natchez Free Trader*, June 26, 1858.

²⁶ It seems that the voters of New Orleans were not influenced in the presidential election of 1860 by the resplendent future which some editors predicted for the city in the event of a dissolution of the Union. According to the *True Delta* (New Orleans), Nov. 7, 1860, the combined vote in the city for Bell and Douglas, both of whom were opposing secession, was more than three to one greater than for Breckinridge, the secession candidate. The *True Delta* gives the vote as follows: Bell, 5219 votes; Douglas, 2998; Breckinridge, 2645. The editor thought the election in New Orleans was a great defeat for "Slidellism." He said that the secession element exercised intimidation and paraded the ruffian element to such an extent that the city polled only about two-thirds of its actual strength.

established. Then will the North, prostrate in the dust, too keenly feel what a precious jewel they have parted with, never to be regained. The South needs no Custom House and will thrive on Free Trade as she never can without it.²⁷

Colonel W. A. Ward of Enterprise, Clarke County, who was an ardent secessionist and apparently very influential in the eastern counties of the state, declared, November 30, 1860, in a letter addressed to "My fellow citizens of Clarke":

Here is the matter in a nutshell: let Mississippi disconnect herself from all those who would oppress her; she has wealth and intelligence; she has a capacious harbor to export and receive in return a just and equivalent remuneration for her vast productions. We can trade direct with Europe, ship our cotton there, the merchant can afford to give us more for it and sell to us cheaper than the Northern merchants can; the farmer will have no extravagant duties to pay as he does now, and a large proportion of which goes to the support of those who are unfriendly to slave labor.²⁸

Railroad building was an integral part of the program for commercial independence in Mississippi. Colin S. Tarpley, a pioneer of the movement in the state, began agitation in 1848 for a railroad connecting Jackson and New Orleans.²⁹ In the period from 1850 to 1860, the dream of Tarpley for a network of railroads connecting the interior portions with the river towns and with an outlet on the Gulf of Mexico was well advanced towards realization. By 1859, the Mobile and Ohio railroad, extending from Mobile along the eastern fringe of Mississippi to Corinth where it connected with the Memphis and Charleston railroads, was completed. Other railroads complete and in operation in Mississippi by 1859, were the New Orleans, Jackson and Great Northern; the

²⁷ Nov. 27, 1860.

²⁸ *Eastern Clarion*, Dec. 12, 1860. See editorial expressing similar views in the *Vicksburg Weekly Sun*, Feb. 20, 1860.

²⁹ *Natchez Free Trader*, June 17, 1858, says: "Ten years ago, when Col. Colin S. Tarpley of Jackson, Mississippi, one of the shrewdest, and most enterprising and public spirited men in our State, took the initiative in the New Orleans, Jackson, and Great Northern Railroad, people were inclined to ridicule the idea and laugh at those who advocated the enterprise. But Tarpley wrote and spoke till a meeting was held at Monticello, where very considerable enthusiasm was manifested, the people awakening to a sense of the feasibility and importance of the move. An adjourned meeting was subsequently held in New Orleans, but it accomplished nothing, and the 'visionary schemers' with their scheme, were hooted at by the less sagacious and far-seeing sovereigns. But conscious that he was right, with views and purposes unchanged, and a determination not to 'give up the ship,' Colonel Tarpley persevered till finally capitalists became convinced of the merits and the importance of the work and heartily entered into it."

Mississippi Central; the Mississippi and Tennessee; and the Vicksburg and Meridian. The first named railroad had its northern terminus at Canton, joining there with the Mississippi Central, which traversed the counties of Madison, Yazoo, Holmes, Carroll, Yalobusha, Lafayette and Marshall, and intersected the Memphis and Charleston at Grand Junction, Tennessee. The Mississippi and Tennessee railroad formed a junction with the Mississippi Central at Grenada, and traversed the counties of Yalobusha, Panola, and De Soto, running to Memphis. Vicksburg and Meridian were connected by a railroad running across the state and forming a junction with the New Orleans, Jackson and Great Northern at Jackson and with the Mobile and Ohio at Meridian.⁸⁰

The immediate completion of the Gulf and Ship Island railroad, rechartered by the legislature in 1857 under new and liberal provisions, was proclaimed everywhere in the state in 1859 as being of paramount importance. This project was designed to form a connection with the other railroads of the state at Jackson and extend southward to Ship Island on the Gulf. It was to be the connecting link between them and "the merchant vessels at Ship Island." The *Natchez Free Trader* predicted that

the building of the Ship Island railroad will result in the building of a great commercial city on the coast, and it will lead to the establishment of a central direct trade with Europe and the other continents of which the South stands so much in need. . . . With a grand trunk railroad running down to her ocean washed shore, with a magnificent emporium lifting its lofty proportions upon her strand, with a splendid harbor thronged with the noble merchants of every nation carrying on the universal trade of exchange, Mississippi will indeed occupy a grand position in the galaxy of States. She will be completely individualized in her sovereignty, and will have nothing to fear from the muttered threatenings of wild sectional fanaticism.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Balthasar M. Myers and Caroline E. MacGill, *History of Transportation in the United States before 1860* (Carnegie Institute, Washington, 1917), Plate 5. See also the *Natchez Free Trader*, Mar. 19, 1859.

⁸¹ Mar. 19, 1859. Editorials expressing similar views with reference to the projected Ship Island railroad are found in the *Natchez Free Trader*, June 15, 1858, Apr. 27, June 17, 1859.

At Carthage, Leake County, strong resolutions were unanimously adopted urging the early construction, "in view of American politics highly menacing to the Union," of the Gulf and Ship Island railroad, connecting "her unrivaled harbor at Ship Island with all parts of the State." The Carthage meeting pledged \$150,000 for the support of the project. See *ibid.*, Mar. 25, 1859.

The Democratic conventions in Harrison and Hancock counties, both of which were under the guidance of D. C. Glenn, adopted strong resolutions in favor of

The report of the Commissioners⁸² of the Gulf and Ship Island railroad which was made in June, 1858, pointed out that in the event of the secession of the state its first duty would be to render its harbor at Ship Island available by means of interior communications which would be at all times under the control of the state. The report urged that not only commercial considerations but also political contingencies rendered probable by the condition of the slavery question, should lead the Mississippi delegation in Congress to devote "some portion of their time and ability to maintaining those measures at home which will fit us to encounter the hazards of an event which will leave us to depend not so much upon the accuracy of our political doctrine, as upon our material resources." Alleging that no purely agricultural people ever attained a high position in the world, the Commissioners urged the building of railroads in order that there might be in the state a better balance between agriculture and commerce. This was necessary, they said, if the state were to maintain an independent position. The spirit and tone of the report is indicated in the following quotation:

It is manifest that the connection between the free and the slave states is not preserved by the strength of their attachment for each other. The antagonism between them not only exists in the most palpable form but is openly avowed. The language in the debates in Congress indicated all the rancour of hate. . . . But whether we remain in the Union or go out of the Union, the course of events clearly indicates that the States in which slavery exists, as the essential basis of their prosperity and power, will be driven to maintain their footing, will depend mainly upon the extent to which they may acquire influence on that theatre. It is our duty to ourselves and the South to build up and strengthen our influence on the Gulf. In the event of a rupture of the Union, or should events hasten the collision which sooner or later must take place on Southern Waters, how much would our position be improved and our influence increased, if by means of a great thoroughfare of travel and transportation, our harbor should be connected with our great cotton growing regions, and a large commercial city spring up there, as it will from the known laws of trade and navigation. At all events the State of Mississippi would have the

rushing the Gulf and Ship Island railroad to completion. The road's speedy completion was "of paramount importance" and a "great measure of independence, security, and defense." See *ibid.*, May 31, June 17, 1859.

⁸² The names of the Commissioners were as follows: Ebenezer Ford of Marion County, Wiley P. Harris and Jacob F. Foute of Hinds, Cornelius McLaurin of Rankin, Simeon R. Adams of Jasper, James Roach and John Willis of Warren, Charles Bellman and T. J. Humphries of Harrison, and Jonathan Weatherby and John Oats of Lawrence. See *ibid.*, June 19, 1858.

security of an untrammelled and independent connection with the markets of the world. We have argued ourselves into the belief that we have the right to assume the position of an independent State. We should then be able to assume it with confidence and maintain it with success.⁸³

The program of expansion and of commercial independence thus championed by the Democracy of Mississippi during the late fifties was pursued not merely that the state might cease to be "‘hewers of wood and drawers of water’ for the merchant princes of the North" but it had the additional motive of being an "initiatory step for dissolving the Union."⁸⁴ When the secession controversy reached a climax in 1860, the feeling among the majority of Mississippians that dissolution would bring to an end the paying of "tribute" to the North and would leave the South free to enter upon an era of expansion and unrivaled commercial prosperity, was not unimportant in determining the result on January 9, 1861.

⁸³ The address in full is printed in the *Natchez Free Trader*, June 19, 1858.

⁸⁴ *Hinds County Gazette*, Jan. 25, 1860, quoting *Vicksburg Whig*. In general, the American or Opposition party in Mississippi advocated the commercial and industrial development of the South, at the same time expressing unqualified disapproval of the Democracy's advocacy of such measures as an "initiatory step in the dissolution of the Union."

